

Washington uses social marketing concepts to develop community action plans

Background

Overview. Washington received funding for obesity prevention activities from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program to Prevent Obesity and Other Chronic Diseases. Part of this funding was used by Washington to coordinate with two cities to develop community action plans that address obesity. The Washington Department of Health (DOH) sent out letters to the mayors of mid-size



cities in Washington to assess their interest in participating in this project. Interested city leaders were then interviewed to determine readiness and commitment to participating. Using interview results and other criteria such

as location and population diversity, the DOH chose Moses Lake and Mount Vernon to participate. Program staff from the DOH (the “state team”) worked with coalitions in these two communities to develop their community action plans. These action plans focus on environmental and policy approaches to increasing physical activity and healthy eating. Each coalition incorporated results from formative research and best practices in these areas to develop a set of priority strategies.

The communities conducted formative research and environmental assessments, while the state team supported the process by providing technical assistance, guidelines, and resources. Each community was responsible for making final decisions and therefore owned the resulting plan.

Although the state team members didn’t follow the whole social marketing process for this project, they did incorporate the principles of social marketing in their work. For example, the communities talked to their target populations about barriers to carrying out recommended nutrition and physical activity behaviors. Also, the coalition members were recruited using a social marketing mindset. Their needs, wants, and barriers to participating were taken into account before they were asked to take part in the coalition. This case describes more fully how the community leaders incorporated social marketing principles into the development of community action plans.

Coalition Recruitment. An important component of this process was choosing effective coalition members. In Mount Vernon, the state team and staff from the University of Washington, its principal partner, met with three people who had expressed interest in the project. These three represented the city government, the local public health department, and the local hospital. They identified several other community leaders who were well informed about the community.

The state team brought Mount Vernon's community leaders together in a lunch meeting and presented the project to them. The purpose of this meeting was to choose coalition members. Those present did not have to be on the coalition but their help was needed to identify the best potential members. This small planning group spent time proposing criteria for coalition members: What skills should they have? What industries or organizations should be represented? Who can make policy changes?

Next, the community leaders identified people who met those criteria and personally contacted potential members. Many people identified through this process agreed to be part of Mount Vernon's coalition and even chose to stay on after the coalition process was finished to work on specific action committees. A few people declined to participate in the coalition but wanted to be a part of some "action." These people were contacted when the planning phase was over and the action committees were being formed.

Coalition Expectations. After Mount Vernon's coalition was assembled, the next step was to develop guidelines for how to



carry out its mission. Coalition members worried that they might be involved in a drawn-out, never-ending process. To prevent this, members were asked to commit to only three or four meetings spread out over 6 months. At the end of this 6-month period, they were free to stay involved or leave, knowing that they had fulfilled their commitment.

Coalition members' responsibilities were clearly laid out from the beginning. Another incentive for participating was the opportunity to network at each meeting.

Training in Social Marketing. The Washington DOH emphasizes the process of social marketing in its work; therefore, many staff members from that agency already understood the process. The state team could also take advantage of social marketing experts with whom they had a standing relationship.

Apply it: *The leaders from Mount Vernon viewed their coalition participants as an audience. They identified some benefits of participating in a coalition and emphasized those. They also learned about potential barriers and tried to eliminate those.*

Describe the Problem

Problem Description. Both coalitions recruited community members to conduct

a community assessment to understand the physical environment in which they lived. Community members assessed the accessibility of the community to walkers and cyclists; parking and bicycle facilities at local schools, parks, grocery stores, convenience stores, and restaurants; and locations of all community bus stops. They also observed local grocery and convenience stores to determine what types of products they carried and who their typical customers were. Because the coalitions were emphasizing policy and environmental changes, they focused on describing the environment that potentially contributes to obesity in these communities, rather than the behavior of their inhabitants.



Conduct Market/Formative Research

Formative Research Development.

In Mount Vernon, the three community representatives (from the city, public health department, and local hospital) worked with the state team to choose questions for the focus groups. They wanted to identify the community's perceived barriers to physical activity and healthy eating, and the approaches that would help overcome those barriers. The coalition members gave feedback on the focus

group questions. Once the questions were finalized, the team hired an outside agency to recruit participants, conduct the focus groups, and analyze the results.

Focus Groups. The coalitions chose to conduct focus groups with the populations for whom good data were lacking. Moses Lake conducted three sets of focus groups for Hispanics, parents, and adults. Moses Lake has a substantial Hispanic population, and the coalition specifically wanted to get its perspectives. Mount Vernon conducted four focus groups—two with parents of children aged 1–9 and two with adults aged 40–65. The coalition was particularly interested in nutrition and physical activity opportunities for children outside the school setting. Hispanic participants were included in each of Mount Vernon's focus groups.

Participants in all focus groups were asked about community assets and barriers to both physical activity and healthy eating. They also were asked to identify what community-level changes they thought would help increase these two behaviors. The coalitions in each community prioritized their action plans based on the results from the focus groups.

Challenge: *The state team found that it was difficult to keep the coalitions focused on environmental and policy issues. In their meetings, if someone suggested a good idea that was focused on individuals or education, the leader acknowledged it as a good idea, but then brought the focus back to environmental and policy changes.*



Create the Intervention Strategy

Strategy Development. The overall goals for the two communities were to increase physical activity and good nutritional choices. Based on the focus group results, community assessments, and their experience with the community, the coalitions for both Moses Lake and Mount Vernon listed possible intervention strategies, and then ranked them. Moses Lake's priorities were a networked path/trail system for physical activity use, promotion and support of breastfeeding (especially at worksites), and creation of community gardens to encourage fruit and vegetable consumption. Mount Vernon's priorities were provision of healthy food and beverages in schools, better urban planning to promote physical activity, and more opportunities for physical activity for school-aged children. Once strategies for each community were chosen, the coalitions devised a list of goals

and action steps to implement them. The completed action plans with all of the goals and action steps are available online in a toolkit (described in Next Steps).

Next Steps

The coalitions shared their action plans with the communities; both asked local residents to become involved by joining work groups to address a specific priority from the action plan. These work groups are designed to implement the actions laid out in the plan by securing resources and developing partnerships. They are responsible for coordinating the efforts to address their priority area and for communicating their successes or challenges to the greater community. In Mount Vernon, the city council officially adopted the action plan.

To promote this process in other communities, the state team created a toolkit that describes what happened in Moses Lake and Mount Vernon.¹ This toolkit includes lessons learned (for each step of the process), criteria for selecting coalition members, roles and responsibilities for coalition members, tools used for community assessments, and the final action plans for both Moses Lake and Mount Vernon. It also includes samples of meeting evaluation forms, timelines, meeting agendas, and press releases.

¹ The toolkit is available online at: http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/nutritionPA/healthy_communities_tool_kit.htm

Washington's Intervention Planning at a Glance	
Behavior Change Theories Used:	
Important Partners:	Moses Lake and Mount Vernon communities University of Washington
Decision-Making Process:	Decisions about priorities were based on 1) coalition members' knowledge of the community, 2) formative research conducted with community members, and 3) environmental assessments—access to healthy foods and places for physical activity Coalition members ranked each strategy and the top ones were chosen as priorities
Overall Target Audience:	Each priority area has a different target audience broadly identified by community stakeholders
Rationale for Target Audience:	
Secondary Audience/Influencers:	
Formative Research:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses Lake: three sets of focus groups with Hispanics, parents, and adults • Mount Vernon: four focus groups (two, parents of young children; two, community adults)
Audience Segments:	
Current Behaviors:	
Behavior Change Goal:	<p>In general: Increase levels of physical activity and increase healthy eating</p> <p>Moses Lake's environmental and policy strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a network of linked paths throughout the community • Promote, protect, and support breastfeeding, specifically in worksites and hospitals • Create community gardens to provide accessible fresh fruits and vegetables and opportunities for physical activity while gardening

Gray boxes indicate places where information either does not apply or is not yet available.

	<p>Mount Vernon's environmental and policy strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure schools provide healthful foods and beverages • Use urban planning approaches that promote physical activity • Encourage policies that provide children with opportunities for physical activity outside of formal physical education classes
Barriers/Costs to Behavior Change:	<p>Some identified barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unhealthy vending machine choices in schools and public buildings • Cost of healthy foods • Limited access to local produce • Lack of physical activity facilities • Not enough miles and connectivity of trails • City planning: land use, street design, traffic and congestion
Benefits/Incentives Offered to Change Behavior:	
Pre-testing:	
Evaluation:	<p>Mount Vernon: evaluation plan with goals and objectives; coalition members evaluated the effectiveness of their meetings</p>
Helpful Tools/Resources Used:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington's community toolkit, available online at: http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/nutritionPA/healthy_communities_tool_kit.htm • Community assessment tools (found in toolkit) • Prevention Institute—Developing Effective Coalitions (www.preventioninstitute.org) • University of Kansas Community Toolbox (http://ctb.ku.edu/about/en/index.jsp)
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This case study is part of a series developed by:

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For additional case studies or more information on
NuPAC's other social marketing resources, please go to:
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